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Title: Plague of Despair

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Adranath tripped slightly in the muck of what had become the swamps of Yew. All around him he felt the pulsing evil of the decay as it fed upon itself, slowly consuming every bit of life in its path. The sensation was so strong now that it took little of his concentration as a user of nature to feel it. The area around him was dense with enough plague spores that they resembled a thick dust. The air swirled with his movements—the ancient Meer was reminded of Clainin's lab, with its hundreds of old texts and tomes stored away on shelves that were rarely given a dusting. At long last he reached his destination; a huge gnarled tree towering into the sky, stretching its dark diseased limbs upward and outward. The entire surface of the tree was covered in rotting grey bark, and within its branches huge pods seemed to glow with an eerie green hue. The swamp bubbled and whirled slightly at the roots of the great plague tree as the pods slowly shed their spores into the winds.

As he opened a small pouch, the Watcher was overwhelmed by another fit of horrible hacking coughs. The attacks came

so strongly now that he felt practically immobilized by the sickness. He hoped the shopkeepers in the area who had become affected were not also suffering as much, but he already knew that was not the case.

One by one he removed a few small items from the pouch and dropped them into a disgusting slimy maw at the base of the plague tree, which absorbed them greedily.

As he pulled the final item from his pouch, he paused to examine it. Ironic, he thought, that the beasts created by the plague should be the very solution to curing the land. He was thankful he had garnered Clainin's assistance in dealing with them; his own magics had become too weak to possibly hold a creature of such power. As he stared intently at the object in his hand, he prayed silently that enough of the special creatures could be found to make a difference.

Finishing, he laid the last small object within the maw of the tree, and watched as it also was absorbed quickly. A few short moments went by, and he began to feel a slight shudder from the tree, and within his mind he could sense the decay buckle and grow weaker. Closing his eyes, he could feel the plague tree before him as it struggled to process the ingredients he had placed inside its hungry maw. Finally, he could sense success; the cure was at hand.

Again, the violent coughs overtook his body and

Adranath stepped back away from the tree. His objective was now clear, but the ingredients he had fed to the plague tree had only a small effect—it would take a great deal more if the land was to be fully cured.

A gust of wind blew through the swamps and the spores of the diseased tree filled the air like smoke. The progress of the decay had barely been halted, and if it was not cured soon Yew would not be able to host life. From his robes, Adranath pulled a small communication crystal given to him by Clainin, knowing that it represented their only real hope. If the word was spread far enough, and fast enough, the land just might be saved in time.